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[TITLE PAGE]

CONTENTS

Notes on the Cultural Provinces of the Southeast. JOHN R. SWANTON..... 373

Functionalism in Social Anthropology. ALEXANDER LESSER..... 386

On the Concept of Function in Social Science. A. R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN. 394

Plains Ghost Dance and Great Basin Music. GEORGE HERZOG..... 403

The Comanche Sun Dance. RALPH LINTON..... 420

Basic Cultures of the Mississippi Valley. THORNE DEUEL..... 429

Some Notes on Winnebago Social and Political Organization. TRUMAN MICHELSON..... 446

The Mechanics of Kinship. B. W. AGINSKY..... 450

Slit Tapestry from the Upper Salt River Valley, Arizona. CHARLIE R. STEEN..... 458

The Joking Relationship and Organized Obscenity in North Queensland. DONALD F. THOMSON..... 460

REPORTS..... 491

BOOK REVIEWS.....*See rear cover*

SOME NEW PUBLICATIONS..... 522

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.....*See rear cover*

NOTES AND NEWS..... 536

This issue is published in two parts, Part 2 being designated Memoir 44.

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3:Michelson E-4 (no date)1935
NP12 Winnebago NP12

SOME NOTES ON WINNEBAGO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION[1]

By TRUMAN MICHELSON

114 THE easily accessible accounts of Winnebago social organization are Morgan's Ancient Society,[2] J. O. Dorsey's Siouan Sociology,[3] the article *Winnebago* in the Handbook of American Indians, initialed by James Owen Dorsey and Paul Radin,[4] and Paul Radin's The Clan Organization of the Winnebago,[5] his Winnebago Tribe,[6] and lastly his The Social Organization of the Winnebago Indians, An Interpretation.[7]

None of these authors apparently were aware that a number of important statements on this and kindred topics are to be found in Caleb Atwater's Remarks made on a Tour to Prairie du Chien; thence to Washington City, in 1829.[8] I quote from this as follows.

614 [532] Carrymaunee (walking turtle) a Winnebago chief carries a large Tortoise, fully extended, and beautifully painted, perfect in all its limbs, on his back as he marches onward at the head of the turtle tribe. In the same manner, Snakeskin marches at the head of the snake tribe, with the skin of a large snake tied around his neck. In fine, every tribe has its standard bearer, with appropriate emblems (p. 87).

Their form of government is aristocratical, and the whole structure of their society is equally so. The Winnebagoes are divided into seven tribes, or bands, some of these are named after animals, such as the Turtle tribe, the Snake tribe, wolf tribe, &c., and others are named after inanimate things, as the Thunder tribe. These tribes dwell in different places, in towns or villages; in each one of 622 which, there are two Civil Chiefs, who govern that town—for instance Du Corri and Winneshiek are at the head of the government, of the Le Croix village situated near the Mississippi river, on its eastern bank, 80 miles north of Prairie Du Chien. So of all the other tribes, each one of which, has its town or seat of government, and is governed by its two civil chiefs. The civil government of the Winnebagoes, is in [523] the hands of fourteen civil Chiefs, and when they are assembled in one council, it is the grand national council.

[1] Printed by permission of the Smithsonian Institution.

[2] Page 157.

[3] Fifteenth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, pp. 240–41.

[4] Bulletin, Bureau of American Ethnology, 30, Pt. 2, pp. 958–61.

[5] American Anthropologist, Vol. 12, 1910, pp. 209–19.

[6] Thirty-seventh Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, p. 181 *et seq.*

[7] Museum Bulletin, Canada Department of Mines, Geological Survey, No. 10 (Anthropological Series, No. 5).

[8] Published by Isaac N. Whiting, Columbus, Ohio, 1831. I have not seen the edition (of the same date) published by Jenkins and Glover. Atwater's The Indians of the Northwest, etc., Columbus, 1850, apparently has the same contents and pagination as his Remarks which I have seen. So we may presume that the 1831 edition (which I have not seen) of his The Indians of the Northwest is the same also. "The Writings of Caleb Atwater" (Columbus, 1833) has apparently disappeared from the Library of Congress. The proofsheets have been verified by consulting the 1850 edition, differences in capitalization being ignored.

3: Michelson E-4 (no date) 1935

NP12 Winnebago NP12

In each village, the two civil chiefs, appoint all the officers, deemed necessary, civil and military, who obey them implicitly. There are two ways of arriving at these high stations, by birth and by election. When the father dies, if he has a son, who has arrived at the age of manhood, and who bids fair to make a good chief—that is, if he possesses a good form, has good bodily powers and mental faculties—is brave, sedate, wise and prudent, he generally succeeds his father in the government, on his father's demise. If the chief, at his death, leave no son who is qualified for the high office of chief, but wills it to some other person, he succeeds to the government. If the chief has no son at his death, it is commonly the case, that his brother's son succeeds him. The line of succession may run out for want of a lawful heir, which is always supplied by an election. It may be changed too, where the heir is unqualified for the station. Great deference is always paid to the will of the dying chief, but every such case is always laid before a full national council, whose decision is final (p. 97).

A chief may be degraded from his rank for bad conduct. . . .

There is in every tribe, what answers to a standing army among us. The profession of arms holds out, to the great mass of the common people, the only road to the temple of fame. . . . The young man, who aspires to the honorable distinction of a "brave" or warrior, must exhibit such traits of character, as are deemed necessary for a soldier to possess, before he can be admitted into the army. When admitted, he wears on his head just as many feathers of the bald eagle, as he has slain human beings, and the size of the feathers indicate the size of his victims. . . . If the warrior has taken a captive, he has a human hand as large as life, painted either on his face, or on some part of his body, or on his blanket, some individuals have several such hands painted upon them (p. 98).[1]

At the head of the army, belonging to each tribe, there is a person who occupies the same station as a General does with us, and he appoints all the inferior officers. The chiefs when met in council, call into it, their warriors, with whom they consult, but frequently they are called to receive the orders, which are obeyed to the letter. This council call before them, persons who are interested in the trial . . . (pp. 98, 99).

If the Senate of the United States is the mildest, the most patriotic and wisest legislative assembly in the civilized world, as it truly is, the Winnebago council, is decidedly at the head of the savage world. . . . The great body of the people have very little influence, almost none, with this council, and they never appear before it unless they are summoned to attend it.—They have no voice in electing the chiefs and in fact no political influence. The civil chiefs and the chief warriors, have in their hands, the whole government of the community, and they govern as they please. Disobedience to the orders of the rulers is punished with death, though, like the British nation, the Indians are not savages enough to cut the traitor into quarters after hanging him until he is dead (pp. 99, 100).

The female part of it, exercised the same influence among the women, that the chiefs did among the men, and the presents they expected from us, had to be better, than those given to the common people. The daughter of a chief, never mar-

[1] Quite different from the data given by Radin, The Winnebago Tribe, pp. 161, 162.

3:Michelson E-4 (no date)1935
NP12 Winnebago NP12

554 ries into a family below her's in dignity. The pride originating in birth, is as deeply
557 seated in the hearts of those who are nobly descended, among the natives of the
582 Northwest, as it is among the petty princes of Germany.

625 It is customary for the chiefs to appoint two soldiers, in each village to keep order in it, and they faithfully do so (p. 100).

431 In each tribe, some one man acts as a divider, by order of the civil chiefs, and
624 by general consent. Whenever we made the men any presents, of pipes, paints, tobacco, or any thing else, the self same men, if Winnebagoes were the Indians receiving the presents, appeared, took charge of the property, and divided it in the most equitable manner, among all present at the time. They reserved nothing for themselves, generally, but held up their empty hands to show their disinterestedness.

[171] If the Sauks and Foxes received presents, two men, one for each tribe, acted as dividers, and the same individuals always performed the same duty (pp. 100–101).

554 . . . "The rolling Thunder," "the Yellow Thunder," "the Distant Thunder," &c., are individuals among the Winnebagoes, who possess great weight of char-
551 acter; and that tribe to which belong men, who stand high on their roll of fame, for
614 their distinguished valor in War, for their consummate prudence, experience and wisdom in the national councils, is emphatically called, "the thunder tribe" (p. 124).

114 There are other items appurtenant to Winnebago ethnology in Atwater's work; some to that of the Sauks and Foxes; some to tribes of the upper Mississippi valley in general: there are some acute statements regarding the chronology of the populating of America.

171 A "turtle" gens does not occur in the lists of Morgan, Dorsey, and Radin,
174 and Radin specifically denies that there is such a Winnebago gens. He also
614 states that almost all informants claimed that the Snake and Fish clans (gentes) were recent to the tribe. However, as special names "go with" fixed gentes, by examining the lists of the signers of the treaties between the
[114] Winnebago and the United States, it becomes clear that a member of the
[648] Snake gens signed the treaty of August 19th, 1825 as well as the treaty of
[551] August 25th, 1828. And a Snake clan exists among the Ponca, Iowa, Oto-Missouri, Quapaw, as well as some non-Siouan tribes.[10] Also it may be observed that among the Osage and Quapaw we have a Fish clan (used rather loosely). So too "Turtle" as the name of a gens (sub-gens) among the Siouan tribes Omaha, Kansa, Quapaw, and Osage,[11] and elsewhere.
[551] And Carrymaunee (Karamanu, etc.), "Walking Turtle,"[12] signed more

[10] See the important theoretical discussion by Lowie in American Anthropologist, Vol. 36, 1934, pp. 327–28; cf. also Radin, the Winnebago Tribe, p. 182; Fletcher and La Flesche, The Omaha Tribe (Twenty-seventh Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology), pp. 38, 39.

[11] Among the Omaha and Osage "the turtle carriers or bearers" and "Turtle-carriers" respectively; "Carries-a-turtle-on-his-back" among the Kansa: observe that according to the above Carrymaunee "carried" a large painted tortoise on his back.

[12] The phonetic restoration is presumably Kéramani; mani means "to walk," as can be seen from old vocabularies, etc., as well as the personal names given by Radin in his The Winnebago Tribe and the Winnebago text by Radin in the Siouan sketch in Handbook of Ameri-

3: Michelson E-4 (no date) 1935

NP12 Winnebago NP12

than one treaty with the United States. Similarly the lists of signers of the treaties of June 3rd, 1816, August 19th, 1825, etc., between the Winnebago and the United States indicate the existence of gentes not in the published lists, but which have analogues among other Siouan tribes. I feel certain that a study of the names of the signers of treaties between United States and such Siouan tribes as have distinctive clan-names (and similar non-Siouan tribes) would yield valuable results. And a study of the personal names of such tribes in older writers would also pay. In this connection I may say that from Atwater's book, using this technique, it can be readily determined that the Eagle and Elk gentes were in existence among the Winnebago in addition to those specifically mentioned by him. The treaties furnish a few others, e.g., Earth, Sky. In this connection I may say that it is clear from the names of the signers of the treaty of May 13th, 1816 that at least the following Sauk gentes were in existence: Sturgeon, Eagle, Thunder, Bear, Swan, Wolf, Fox, Partridge, Sea. It is not without interest to note that all these save Partridge and Fox are on Forsyth's list of 1827.[13] If we count Partridge as the equivalent of Grouse, all occur in Jones' list printed in the Handbook of American Indians in the article *Sauk*. Sturgeon, Swan, and Partridge are not in Skinner's list. Sturgeon, Eagle, Sea (= Great Water), Bear, Thunder, Partridge (= Pheasant), Wolf, and Fox occur in Galland's list. Wolf, Bear, Eagle, Sturgeon, Fox, Sea, and Thunder occur in Morgan's list. If we pool M. R. Harrington's two lists we find Thunder, Fox, Wolf, Bear, Swan, Sturgeon, Eagle on them. A knowledge of the names on the tribal rolls from the earliest times would doubtless shed much light on the subject.

It should be mentioned that Radin argues for a priority of village groups, but states that according to all informants each Winnebago village was inhabited by members of various clans, and that in no case did a village merely include members of the same clan. Observe the contradiction with Atwater's data.

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can Indian Languages (Bulletin, Bureau of American Ethnology, 40, Pt. 1). There are equivalents in several Siouan languages. In the Siouan sketch Radin gives kec'û'ûgegą as a personal name, "the tortoise," and ke'c'û'ûgĸra as "you, tortoise," and in note 38 of the Winnebago text we are told that ke'c'ûûk or kec'û'ûgi is a large species of turtles, and that kẻ also means "turtle." La Flesche gives ke (in my transcription) as the Osage for "turtle, tortoise, terrapin," but Dorsay gives k'e (in my transcription) for both Osage and Quapaw, but ke (in my transcription) for Omaha; k'eya, "tortoise," is given by Deloria for Dakota. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the formation of personal names in Winnebago to be positive whether ra is the pronoun "thou" (vocative; see notes 39 and 46 to Radin's Winnebago text) or whether kera may be an archaic correspondent to Dakota k'eya with the recognized shift of y to r.

[13] They are in his Fox list.